The neutrino turns 60

June 27, 2016

A fusion-powered rocket to deflect deadly comets

Really big space rocks (a mile or wider across) crash into Earth about once every 500,000 years. That's rare, but we might not spot the next one until it's too late for existing technology to stop it—especially if it's a comet. Because comets can travel twice as fast as an asteroid, we'd need something 20 times more powerful than anything in our arsenal to fend it off. What's humanity to do? One scientist has an answer: fusion rockets.

Glen Wurden, a plasma physicist at Los Alamos National Laboratory by day and an amateur astronomer by night, has conceived a comet-buster that would work like this: Harnessing the tremendous energy of fusion, the process in which two atomic nuclei collide to form a new nucleus, could propel a rocket to more than 100 kilometers per second.

Read more.

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